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THE  
BLESSEDNESS  
OF  
DYING IN THE LORD:  
A SERMON.

PREACHED IN  
HAWORTH CHURCH,

MAY 23, 1791.

*Occasioned by the DEATH*  
OF

The Rev. JOHN RICHARDSON, M.A.  
Late MINISTER of that CHURCH.

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By the Rev. MATTHEW POWLEY, M.A.  
VICAR of DEWSBURY, YORKSHIRE; K

And published at the REQUEST of the CONGREGATION.

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*Precious in the Sight of the Lord is the Death of his Saints.*

PSALM cxvi. 15.

——— Smitten Friends  
Are Angels sent on Errands full of Love:  
For us they languish, and for us they die.

DR. YOUNG.

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### ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following plain Sermon was written for a plain congregation; and would never have been published, had it not been for the request of the people; and a request too, that they might have it to keep in remembrance of their beloved pastor; and such a request, the author owns, he could not refuse.— A few trifling alterations, and but a very few, have been made in it: to have made more would have seemed inconsistent with the declaration in the title-page.





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THE  
BLESSEDNESS  
OF  
DYING IN THE LORD.

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*Revelations, xiv. 13.*

AND I HEARD A VOICE FROM HEAVEN, SAYING  
UNTO ME, WRITE, BLESSED ARE THE DEAD,  
WHICH DIE IN THE LORD FROM HENCEFORTH:  
YEA, SAITH THE SPIRIT, THAT THEY MAY  
REST FROM THEIR LABOURS, AND THEIR  
WORKS DO FOLLOW THEM.

**D**EATH is the common lot of all men :  
the old and the young, the king and the  
beggar, the minister and his parishioner must  
alike lie down in the dust. None are exempt,  
not even the righteous, from the stroke of  
death. *It is appointed unto men, once to die—*  
Heb. ix. 27. This revelation asserts, and  
universal experience proves. We see it, we  
hear it from day to day. Conviction strikes  
us by every sense.

But

But though all must die, there is a great difference between the death of the righteous and that of the wicked, in some important respects. The former die in the Lord, and go to glory; the latter die in sin, and go to endless sorrow. But I must confine myself to the former of these subjects; in enlarging upon which I shall endeavour to shew,

- I. What it is to die in the Lord; and
- II. What is the blessedness thereof. After this
- III. I shall apply the subject to the mournful occasion of our present assembly; and shall then
- IV. Conclude with an address to you, who have long sitted under the ministry of your late beloved pastor.

And oh! that I could enlarge upon these topicks in a manner becoming the sorrowful occasion, and in a way that might be profitable to all your souls!

I. I am to shew what it is to *die in the Lord*.  
But before I enter more particularly upon the subject, it may be necessary to premise, that the

the death of all God's people is not in all respects alike. Some are *filled with all joy and peace in believing*—Rom. xv. 13. While others are distressed with doubts and fears, or, at best, have only *a good hope thro' grace*—2 Thes. ii. 16. But in the following particulars I apprehend the death of them all is the same.

1. They are humbled for their sins, and renounce all dependence upon their works and services. To talk to them about their merits would create distress instead of administering consolation. They are sensible that they are *vile*—See Job xl. 4.—and therefore *abhor themselves, and repent in dust and ashes*—Job xlii. 6. All self-confidence is gone, and they find every day fresh cause for contrition and compunction of heart before God. They therefore spend some of their last moments in acts of humiliation for their sins.

2. They place all their hope of salvation upon Christ crucified. He is *all their salvation, and all their desire*. By faith they rely upon their Redeemer, and would not for a thousand worlds let go their hold. His blood, righteousness, intercession, and grace, they anchor their

their souls upon, and trust in for eternity, Even when sin, death and hell would dismay them, hence they derive a reviving cordial. For this reason they continue to the last exercising faith upon Jesus, and making him their all in all.

3. They give themselves unto prayer. As their all must come from God, they pour out their souls before him in fervent cries for pardon and peace, for sanctification and comfort, for strength and victory, for grace and glory. They choose to meet their last enemy upon their knees, and very earnest at times are their supplications unto God. Their whole souls seem to be engaged in the exercise, and it is the language of each of them, *I will not let thee go, except thou bless me*—See Gen. xxxii. 26. At times indeed they are sensible of the coldness of their hearts in prayer. This they bewail before God, and earnestly desire their christian friends to pray for them. But however cold their devotions may seem to them at times, they would, if they could have their wish, spend their last breath in prayer.

4. They



4. They meditate much upon the word of God. It is the ground of their confidence, and the source of their comfort. Its promises, when applied by the Holy Ghost, are the joy and rejoicing of their hearts. For this reason the word of God is their *meditation all the day*. Psal. cxix. 97. Yea, they *meditate in it*, as they are able, day and night. Psal. i. 2. They hear it, read it, pray over it, and encourage themselves with it. The consequence is, thro' the Lord's blessing, they can say of the sacred pages, *more to be desired are they than gold, yea than fine gold: Sweeter also than honey and the honey comb*. Psal. xix. 10. Indeed as the Lord opens and applies them, they afford the richest cordial that dying saints are acquainted with.

5. They speak highly of their Lord. The language of a dying Christian is, *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee*. Psal. lxxiii. 25. *God forbid, that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Gal. vi. 14. One of our pious Martyrs was so impressed with the views of his glory, that he cried out at the stake, "None but Christ, none but Christ." Indeed



what can a dying faint have to speak of, compared to the loveliness and the love of his adorable Lord?

6. They exhort and admonish others, and particularly those who are near and dear to them, to attend to the concerns of their precious souls. They do this indeed at all times, but more especially on their death-beds. They see then that time is short, and that they shall never more have an opportunity to speak for God and immortal souls. Impressed therefore with a sense of eternal things, and strengthened by divine grace, they endeavour to bear a dying testimony for God, and to be as profitable as may be both to saints and sinners. In this way Jacob, Moses, Joshua, and David, spent their last moments. And who, that has any bowels of compassion, any love to Jesus, or any desire after the salvation of never-dying souls, will not, as death approaches, call upon his friends afresh to *prepare to meet their God*. See Amos iv. 12.

7. They shew their love to their christian friends. At all times this is a sure sign of grace. *We know, says St. John, that we have passed*

*passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.* 1 John iii. 14. But if this be so with believers at other times, it is more especially so, when in a few moments they must bid them a long adieu. Oh! how do they then love the saints, desire their company, delight in their conversation, request their prayers, and receive with gratitude every token of their christian regard? *In them is all their delight.* Psal. xvi. 3. To die thus is to die in the Lord.

But it is time, Secondly, to shew the blessedness thereof. *Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.* In life they may be, as the context supposes, persecuted and slain; but in death they are truly blessed. Their state is so. They enter into exquisite and unutterable felicity. The glory of paradise, the society of saints and angels, and the immediate fruition of God, constitute their fulness of delight. Figure to yourselves every ingredient of the most exquisite happiness, and all will be exceeded here. Yes; *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.* 1 Cor. ii. 9. If this scripture be true of the blessings

of grace, how much more is it so, as it respects the blessings of glory? But of this we cannot doubt, when we reflect that in *God's presence is fulness of joy, at his right hand there are pleasures for evermore.* Psalm xvi. 11. But further, *They rest from their labours of every kind. Man is born unto trouble in life, as the sparks fly upward.* Job v. 7. But when death comes, the saints are no longer subject to toil and wearisomeness, to sorrows and sufferings, to calumnies and persecutions from men, to temptations and conflicts with satan, or to those violent contests which they suffer from their evil hearts. The war in the members will then be over. Never more shall it cloud their evidences, damp their joys, or break their peace. What Job says of wicked men is equally true of the powers of darkness and of an evil heart: *There, i. e. in death, the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest.* Job iii. 17. Yes; all their labours over, all their services performed, and all their conflicts ended, they shall enter upon their final and eternal rest. And oh! what will they think of the services and sufferings of time, when they have reigned thousands and tens of thousands of years in glory? It follows, *and their works do follow them.* They do

do not go before them, to procure them an entrance into heaven. That they cannot do: nor is it needed. Jesus has purchased it for them by *his obedience unto death, even the death of the cross*; and this is a sufficient title to everlasting glory. Indeed it must be so; seeing hereby he fulfilled the requirements of the law, satisfied the demands of justice, expiated our dreadful guilt, and “opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers”—*Te Deum.*

But for what then do their works follow them? They follow them to witness the truth of their conversion, and to receive a recompence of reward. They do it to witness the truth of their conversion and the goodness of their state. The good works of believers will evidence to angels and to saints, that their faith was unfeigned, and their profession truly christian. Hence it will appear, that according to the gospel scheme, they are justly admitted to everlasting glory.

But the works of God's people follow them also to receive a recompence of reward; a reward, indeed, not of debt, but of grace.  
All



All the services which they have performed for God, for his people, and for their own souls, shall be then rewarded. None shall be excepted, not even the least. This is clear from that declaration of our Lord: *Whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward*—Mark ix. 41. The Lord even now tells his people's wanderings, and puts their tears in his bottle—Psalm lvi. 8. He will not forget their work and labour of love—Heb. vi. 10. No; their light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory—2 Cor. iv. 17. In that day their sufferings for Christ shall be rewarded, not only above their deserts, but also beyond their expectations.

The certainty of all this is indubitable. *I heard*, says St. John, *a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead, &c.* Now what could be the design of ushering in these words with such solemnity, but to shew their truth and importance? But I proceed,

III. To



III. To apply the subject to the mournful occasion of our present assembly. Your late worthy pastor I knew upwards of thirty years since in the University of Oxford. He was then truly in earnest about eternal things, nor do I remember ever to have seen or heard of any thing in him which was contrary to his profession. At that time I and several others, who were inferior both in years and grace, were much indebted to him for his instructions and advice. I remember the many happy moments, in which *we took sweet counsel together, and walked into the House of God in company.* Psal. lv. 14. After his removal from Oxford, I did not know much of him, till he was fixed in this place. Since that time you have been witnesses of his exemplary deportment both in public and in private. In private, the study of God's Word and prayer were his daily employment. He always retired three times a day to pour out his soul before God in secret, and suffered no day to pass over him without praying twice with his family. In public when he had any sick to visit, they had his first attention; and the poorest person in the parish had as free access to him as the richest. In performing

forming this part of his duty, it was his constant practice to relieve those, whom he believed to be objects of charity. I need not tell you that he always preached twice on the Lord's Day, and frequently on other days, when his health would permit. St. Paul's charge to Timothy seems to have weighed much with him—*Preach the word, be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine.*—2 Tim. iv. 2. Publickly, and from house to house, as you very well know, did he *warn every man, and teach every man in all wisdom, that he might (if possible) present every man perfect in Christ Jesus*—Col. i. 28. Indeed, in every respect, *He took heed unto himself, and unto his doctrine, and continued in them, that by doing this he might both save himself, and you who heard him*—1 Tim. iv. 16. I need not remind you, that under his ministry, religion appeared in her mildest form. You have been witnesses of his exemplary meekness, humility, tenderness and affection. You have been witnesses of the exercise of his peaceable, forbearing and forgiving spirit. Nor are you strangers to his zeal and disinterestedness. And tho' he was not free from the remains of corruption, yet you know well, that his life and doctrine were such as became the Gospel  
of

of our Lord Jesus Christ. And I may now add, your crowded attendance to hear his funeral sermon, so long after his decease, the solemnity of your deportment, your sorrowful looks, and the tears which you have shed, all testify, that *you know that there hath been \* a Prophet among you.* See Ezek. ii. 5.

With regard to his departure out of this world, I cannot say much. He was always backward in speaking of himself; at least in what might seem to be to his praise; and, during a great part of his illness, was so oppressed with drowsiness, as to be prevented from speaking as much as he otherwise would have done. At the time also no minutes were taken of what dropped from his lips.

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But

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\* It is hoped that no one will take offence at the application of this term to a Minister of the Gospel, in the way it is here done. In the Old Testament indeed, those who are stiled Prophets were generally such as were sent of God in an extraordinary way, such as spake by inspiration, and foretold future events. But in the present application of the word, nothing of this kind is intended. I mean no more by it, than "one truly commissioned and sent by God, tho' in an ordinary way, to make his mind known unto the people from the Holy Scriptures." In this sense, or nearly so, the term appears to have been sometimes used even in the Old Testament. See Exod. vii. 1. And in the New, the Ministers of Christ bear this name, and preaching or expounding the Scriptures is denominated prophesying. See 1 Cor. xiv. 1, 3, 4, 5, 39.

But from what can be recollected, he appears to have been one and the same person in life and in death. Throughout his illness he was remarkably patient and resigned to the will of God. At one time he said, he did not desire to recover; at another he expressed a wish, that if it should please God to raise him up again, he might be made more useful to precious souls. Indeed, to be useful seemed to be his constant aim through life. His conversation in his sickness was the same that it had been in his health. He always seemed the happiest when talking about Christ and eternal things. He sometimes complained that he had not that measure of communion with God which he could have wished; at others, he seemed full of peace, and told his friends that he had no doubts and fears, as it respected the safety of his state. When he could not read, he expressed the satisfaction he found in recollecting passages which he had read or heard before. To those who were around him he very frequently recommended the good ways of God, and exhorted them to walk in his faith and fear. Just before his death he lifted up his hands in prayer; and almost as soon as he had ceased, he breathed his soul  
into



into the hands of God without a struggle or a sigh. But,

IV. I am to conclude this discourse with an address to you, who have long sat under the ministry of your deceased pastor.\* Your privileges have been great, particularly in this, that you have been favoured with a Minister, who has *watched for your souls, as one who must give account*. Heb. xiii. 17. But has God's end in sending him, and his, in labouring amongst you, been answered? Has the word reached your hearts, and converted you effectually unto God? Have you fled to Christ

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for

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\* As this sermon was preached upon the death of the Rev. Mr. Richardson; the exhortation is urged from that consideration only. But in order to add weight to it, the congregation, I am persuaded, will permit me to add, that he is the second Minister, whose life, whose labours, and whose death have been uncommon privileges, and for which they will have to answer at the decisive judgment. The Rev. Mr. Grimshaw, Mr. Richardson's immediate predecessor, was a man of a rare spirit. His piety was very exalted; his labours were exceeding abundant, and his death was uncommonly glorious. See Mr. Venn's sermon, preached on the occasion of his death. Oh! that the congregation upon reading this, may consider seriously what privileges they have enjoyed, and what they will have to answer for, if (which God forbid!) they should yet continue impenitent. As few have been favoured like them, few will be so inexcusable; if after all they be found *like the deaf adder, that stoppeth her ear; which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely*. Psal. lviii. 4, 5.



for refuge, and experienced his hallowing influences? If not, what a fearful state are you in? As you have not lived the life, how can you *die the death of the righteous, and your latter end be like his*? Num. xxiii. 10. If you die as you are, how can you die in the Lord, or *rest in peace from your labours* after death? It cannot be. On the contrary, in hell the smoke of your *torment will ascend up for ever and ever; and you shall have no rest day nor night.* Rev. xiv.

11. With regard to *your works*, they *will indeed follow you*: but what works are they? Perhaps lewdness, drunkenness, lying, swearing, backbiting, sabbath-breaking, or dishonesty. And what will these and such like works follow you for? Will they witness for or against you? or will they procure you a reward in heaven or in hell? O how must your mercies aggravate the guilt of your impenitence, and render you speechless before God? May we not apply the prophet Jeremiah's words to you, *the bellows are burnt, the lead is consumed of the fire, the founder melteth in vain, for the wicked are not plucked away* from their evil practices. God's judgments have not reclaimed you, and your Minister's life and labours have been spent without profit. You

are

are not yet converted unto God. Wherefore *reprobate silver shall men call you, because the Lord hath rejected you.* Jer. vi. 29, 30. When such means have been ineffectual, what can you expect but to be rejected of God, and consigned over to the place of everlasting torment? Think, my brethren, how awful will it be, to have your Minister, who has so often spoken to you for your good, become *a swift witness against you?* How awful indeed, to have *the things, which belong to your peace, hid for ever from your eyes?* Luke xix. 42. Surely *it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment, than for you.* Matt. x. 15. Oh! then awake from your sinful security. Rouse ye in God's name. Trifle no longer. Believe me, *it is high time to awake out of sleep.* Rom. xiii. 11. *the Judge standeth before the door.* James v. 9. and eternity is near. Think not of a more convenient season for your return unto God; for one more convenient than the present there cannot be. Indeed how should there? for *behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.* 2 Cor. vi. 2. May God grant that what neither your Minister's life nor labours could effect, may be accomplished in you by his much-lamented death. But

But many of you have not perverted the means of grace in this way. No: You have *received with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to save your souls.* James i. 21. Jesus has *of God been made unto you wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.* 1 Cor. i. 30. In consequence hereof, you have often heard your deceased Minister with delight, and profited by his discourses. But now he is gone, and you *shall see his face no more.* See Acts xx. 25. Yet fear not; the Head of the Church still liveth, and he has *the residue of the Spirit*, and can send you another after his own mind. May he do it speedily and peaceably,\* if it be his will!—As it is, be thankful for the life and labours of your late Minister. Bless God for the good you have received from him, and endeavour still to improve what you can recollect of his preaching and practice. By these, *tho' dead*, let him yet speak to you. See Heb. xi. 4. With regard to his death, let your mourning for it be directed to a right end, that it may turn to a good account. Could he now appear to you for a moment, how would he address you? perhaps  
nearly

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\* This alludes to an apprehension, that there would be a dispute about the right of patronage to the Church.

nearly in the words of our Lord to the daughters of Jerufalem ; *Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.* Luke xxiii. 28. Your lofs is his gain. Rejoice therefore in his felicity, and blefs God for bringing him fafe to glory. Mourn over the hardnefs of your hearts. Bewail your defects in duty; and let the poor improvement, which you have made under the miniftry of your late Paftor, be a lamentation to you. Let the prefent folemnity animate you to greater diligence in the Lord's fervice. Walk according to the inftructions which he gave, and the example which he fet you. *Be ye followers of him, even as he alfo was of Chrift.* 1 Cor. xi. 1. Let a deadnefs to the world, and a devotednefs of heart to God, be vifible in all your ways. Let Chrift crucified be all your dependance; and let it be your prayer and endeavour to love him more, and to ferve him better from day to day. *Give diligence to make your calling and election fure.* 2 Pet. i. 10.

Let your Minifter's happy deceafe fortify you alfo againft the fear of death. Death is a vanquifhed foe. The Lord has difarmed him of his ftmg, and the believer may fay with St. Paul,



Paul, *Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, thro' our Lord Jesus Christ.* 1 Cor. xv. 57. Be bold, each one of you, to adopt the Psalmist's language, *Tho' I walk thro' the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou [Lord] art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.* Psal. xxiii. 4. Yes, my christian brethren, let your Minister's death be considered by you as a silent lecture, the purport of which may be comprehended in these lines,

March on: nor fear to win the day,  
Tho' death and hell obstruct the way.

On such a subject one hardly knows how to have done. But I must not detain you longer. There is however one exhortation more, which I must subjoin, and which may be peculiarly needful for you at this time. I cannot express it so well as in St. Paul's concluding address to the Corinthians, *Finally, brethren, farewell: be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of Love and Peace shall be with you.* 2 Cor. xiii. 11.

FINIS.

